

Ray Bradbury

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Ray Bradbury is one of those rare individuals whose writing has changed the way people think. Through more than five hundred published works—short stories, novels, plays, screenplays, television scripts, and verse—Bradbury demonstrates the creative American imagination at its full potential. More than any other person of his profession, Bradbury has been regarded as one of the most respected science fiction writers for the past half century. Bradbury has won the admiration of the literary establishment as well as a huge general audience by bringing themes from the literary mainstream, poetic style, complex plots, and social satire to science fiction and fantasy settings. According to critics, he is a “sci-fi” legend; science-fiction has become reality and his courage has brought a new vision to the world of creative writing.

Having published over 500 works, his first book was Dark Carnival (1947) in which he put all of his “night-sweats and terrors down on paper.” Then one of his most remembered books was The Martian Chronicles (1950) in which men of the future colonize Mars. The Illustrated Man (1951) is another of his popular books. Stories sentimentally reminding us of the author’s own midwestern boyhood in Waukegan, Illinois, are apparent in his book Dandelion Wine (1957). Said by critics to be his best work is Fahrenheit 451 (1953), a short novel set in a future totalitarian society where reading is banned. Also included, is Bradbury’s own favorite, Something Wicked This Way Comes (1962). Bradbury has received numerous awards for the majority of his

works, but more importantly his works have influenced society and the art of writing science fiction.

“Bradbury has been one of the most influential contemporary writers of science fiction and fantasy, turning them both into respected genres of literature,” according to a Fox News reporter. Due in part to Bradbury’s influence, in every school around the country science fiction and fantasy are part of the curriculum. To Bradbury this results in bringing “more power, more influence, more imagination to the youth than ever before.” His literature has also resulted in technological advancements in society. Bradbury and other writers of his genre often met with Caltech students in Clifton’s cafeteria in Los Angeles and discussed space exploration. Before space travel was thought of as a realistic possibility, Bradbury was implanting ideas of the modern day’s first rockets into the college research students’ minds. Due to his vivid imagination, Bradbury’s dream of human civilization on Mars is now becoming a possibility.

Ray Bradbury is known as one of America’s greatest creative geniuses. In style, few match him,” according to Sam Moskowitz, historian of science fiction. Bradbury was once criticized by a majority of critics for not writing more realistically. This is because he often used to write about Mars. Then critics realized that he was not really concerned with how the astronauts got there, or how they breathed, or what the atmosphere was like; he was more concerned with putting them on a distant planet and revealing their human reactions, both good and bad. He may have written unrealistically but there was always at least one element in his writing that people could relate to, like their reactions to a foreign place.

Bradbury liked to write about his youth. An exceptionally imaginative child, Bradbury was tormented during his first ten years of his life with fears, nightmares, and frightening fantasies, all of which went into his memory for later use. He always tried to remain optimistic throughout his books, taking the truth and bending it to look the way he wanted to see it. Bradbury describes “Green Town” in one of his novels, which is really Waukegan, Illinois, an old ugly harbor with coal docks and rail yards. But Bradbury describes “Green Town” as a much more beautiful and happy place. He wrote about “whatever seized him” and saw where it led him, draft after draft, until it was something he liked. He called this science fiction, not fantasy, because he believed he was taking something that already existed and making it a better reality.

Bradbury’s main reason for writing went much deeper than to entertain: he believed in what he wrote, bringing a new perspective to science fiction writing. The most common theme throughout his works is “man’s mechanical aptitudes, his incredible ability to pry into secrets of the physical universe, may be his fatal flaw.” Bradbury believes that the human race tries too hard to discover the reasons for everything; Bradbury supports the idea of destiny, in that he believes that we will discover what we need to know through out our exploration of space. Another common theme is that “science ran too far ahead of us too quickly, and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness . . . emphasizing machines instead of how to run machines.” For example, Bradbury once said in an interview for Writer’s Digest, “the trouble with the automobile is the false, hypnotic sense of freedom it gives, making it a dangerous device to put “in the hands of so many maniacs and morons who then proceed to go out and kill

2,000,000.” When viewed closely, Bradbury’s works give many cautions and warnings about what he believes may be ahead.

Today Bradbury is a celebrated author, noted for his ability to write science fiction and fantasy. He is even more distinguished for his ability to make fantasy out of the everyday world. As shown in Dandelion Wine, Bradbury has the ability to make a “delicate mixture of sweet nostalgia and darker memories of loneliness, fear and death, all enriched by his luminous style, credible characters, compassion, and honesty.” And what does this writing teach us? First and foremost, it reminds us that we are alive and that it is a gift and a privilege, not a right. And second, that we must earn life after it has been awarded to us. Bradbury does his best to instill optimism and imagination into his readers in order to inspire them to live the best life possible. Bradbury best described his greatest inspiration when he said the following, “I have never stopped writing which means I have never stopped loving.” [From “About Ray Bradbury,” Ray Bradbury. <http://raybradbury.com/about.html> (Oct. 2, 2005); Beverly Friend, “Bradbury’s early Waukegan magic,” Chicago Daily News (May 3, 1975); Ray Bradbury, “Happy Birthday to me!” Ray Bradbury. <http://www.raybradbury.com/inhiswords.html> (Oct. 2, 2005); Ray Bradbury, Interview. Fox News, Oct. 4, 2005. <http://foxnews.com> (Sept. 25, 2005); Chris Jepsen and Richard Johnston, “A Brief Biography.” Ray Bradbury Online <http://www.spaceagecity.com/bradbury/bio.htm> (Sept. 20, 2005); Joe Hartlaub, “Author Profile: Ray Bradbury Bio.” Teenreads.com. <http://www.teenreads.com/authors/au-bradbury-ray.asp> (Oct. 6, 2005); Mary E. Kiffer, ed. “Bradbury, Ray,” in Current Biography; Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451; Patricia Tennison, “Waukegan ‘Ghosts’ haunt Ray Bradbury’s novel tales,” Chicago Tribune. May 18, 1983; and D. C. Wands, “Ray

Bradbury,” Fantastic Fiction, http://fantasticfiction.co.uk/authors/Ray_Bradbury (Oct. 2, 2005).]